

Across-the-Board Innovator

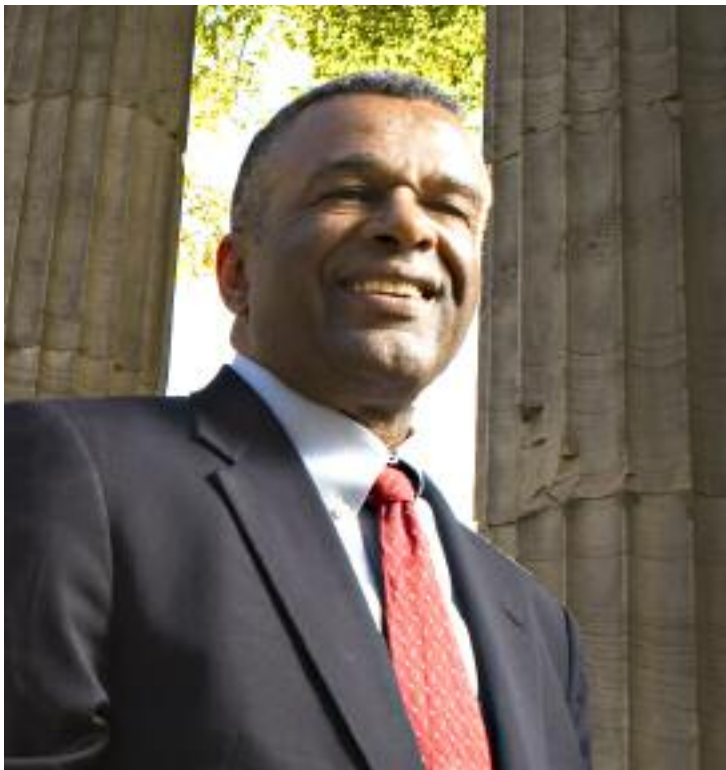
No issue is beyond his realm of interest

Ron Sims has a very straightforward way of getting things done. "I get everyone in the same room, and I'll start the meeting by saying, 'Children fight and adults find solutions.' That helps get people focused on the goal, and it gets them to start listening to each other."

This approach seems to work. Now serving a third term as the elected executive of King County, Washington, the 58-year-old Sims has racked up a string of accomplishments that include reforming health care, putting his county at the forefront battling global warming, launching an aggressive program of open space preservation and deftly managing the county's budget within the stringent limits set under state law.

He has done these things, says county council chairman Larry Phillips, in part by his far-sighted approach to policy. "In 1986 [when Sims and Phillips were both council members], Ron was talking about how the county should be paying attention to global climate change. He spent time getting smart about those issues, and then he figured out a way to bring it down to action at the local level."

But it's his personal style that really helps cinch deals, according to Phillips and others who have partnered with Sims. "He's a guy with good ideas, he's not afraid to lead, and he's a forceful speaker," Phillips notes. "Put those together, and you've got a pretty good combination." Denis Hayes, president of the Seattle-based, pro-environment Bullitt Foundation and the founder of Earth Day, adds, "The flip answer is that his default facial expression is a smile. The serious answer is that he's al-



ways looking for common ground, and he operates from a clear set of guiding principles. And if he doesn't make it to the goal line today, he'll come back and work toward it another day."

Sims, on the other hand, is quick to credit a strong county council and an emerging political environment that has allowed county government to do things such as expand public transit, preserve 135,000 acres of open space, build a public-private regional health care consortium that's improving health outcomes and cutting costs, and most recently, become the first county to sign on to the Chicago Climate Exchange.

"People understand that we've done all we can to become more efficient," Sims says, referring in part to Washington's past spate of tax-cutting voter initiatives that squeezed local government budgets hard. "Now, people want things fixed—parks, transportation, schools, the environment.

They want to see the quality of their kids' lives improved."

Joining the Climate Exchange is a typical Sims fix. Not only will membership allow the county to cash in on carbon credits through conservation, reduce pollution locally and help fight global warming, but the county also was able to push for new emission-trading rules that much more accurately credit local governments for aggressive expansion of public transit.

And while Sims might present as a hard-core liberal—he's a vocal supporter of gay marriage—he's a pragmatist. On the policy side, he points out that he was among the first in the nation to support electronic fingerprinting. On the administrative side, he man-

aged to carve tens of millions of dollars out of the county's \$3.1 billion budget by cutting mid-level management and asking front-line staff for cost-cutting and revenue-boosting ideas. Among his favorites: The county's wastewater staff lured a local sanitation business away from the federal facility down the road.

What gives Sims the greatest credibility, though, is that he practices what he preaches. When he called on county employees to start living healthier lifestyles, a look in the mirror suggested that he could stand to heed the same advice. "I had to embark on a new lifestyle," Sims says, and that new lifestyle included eating better and biking. Last July, 40 pounds lighter, he knocked off a 220-mile, Seattle-to-Portland bike ride in two days. And in typical Sims fashion, he's not planning to stop there. "People tell me I look good," he says, "but I still have 25 pounds to go."

—Jonathan Walters